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Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District Oral History Series

Reba L. Gauer

STRAIGHT RUN: THIRTY-NINE YEARS DRIVING A BUS FOR THE ALAMEDA-CONTRA  
COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT

Interview conducted by  
Laura McCreery  
in 2002





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Reba L. Gauer, "Straight Run: Thirty-Nine Years  
Driving a Bus for the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit  
District," an oral history conducted in 2002 by Laura  
McCreery, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft  
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The last of the women bus drivers for AC Transit whose careers began during World War II: (from left) Reba L. Gauer, Dorothy Torrenga, G. L. "Mo" Gross, and Marjorie Ezell. (January 1985 photo courtesy of AC Transit)



## Cataloging information

GAUER, Reba L. (b. 1921)

Bus Driver, Streetcar Operator

*Straight Run: Thirty-Nine Years Driving a Bus for the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District*, i, 41 pp., 2003

Childhood in Missouri and Arkansas; streetcar conductorette in Los Angeles; driving streetcars for Key System in Alameda County during World War II; change to driving buses; National City Lines purchase of Key System, 1946; and AC Transit purchase, 1960; changes to public transit with BART, 1972; women and minority employees for Key System; disability access on buses; mechanical and physical aspects of bus driver responsibilities; labor strikes and union relations; working for Contra Costa County Connection; safety issues and outstanding safety record at AC Transit.

Interviewed in 2002 by Laura McCreery for the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Regional Oral History Office  
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Berkeley, California 94720

# BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Reba L Gauer

Date of birth 8-31-1921 Birthplace Missouri

Father's full name FA Lauer

Occupation Lumber Dealer Birthplace Missouri

Mother's full name Bettie E Maddox Lauer

Occupation House wife Birthplace Missouri

Your spouse/partner William T Gauer

Occupation Transportation Birthplace Missouri

Your children Norma Lee Gauer & Michael Ray Gauer

Where did you grow up? Thomasville Missouri

Present community Armona Ca

Education 11th Grade

Occupation(s) Bus Driver & Street Car Operator

Areas of expertise \_\_\_\_\_

Other interests or activities My Grand children & My children and caring for my dog. Playing Bingo with my sister

Organizations in which you are active none (Senior Citizens

SIGNATURE Reba L Gauer DATE: 5-8-02





## INTERVIEW WITH REBA L. GAUER

[Interview 1: May 25, 2002] ##<sup>1</sup>

McCreery: My name is Laura McCreery and I'm going to be interviewing Mrs. Reba L. Gauer at her sister's home in Antioch. This is for the AC Transit Oral History Project. Mrs. Gauer's sister is here, Wilma Morgan, and I hope to come back and interview her later on for this same project.

What I would like to start off with today, Mrs. Gauer, is if you could just tell me your date of birth and then something about where you were born.

Gauer: My date of birth is August 31, 1921. I was born in Teresita, Missouri.

McCreery: How did your family happen to be there, do you know?

Gauer: No, I don't.

McCreery: Never did hear a story about that?

Gauer: The only story I ever heard was that I was born in a barn because--

Morgan: You were born in a new house.

Gauer: My dad [F.A. Parvin] had built a new home, and I was born in the new house. I moved to Arroll, Missouri, and that's where I started to school.

McCreery: Do you know how old you were then?

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<sup>1</sup> ## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.



Gauer: I was six years old. Then we moved to Kansas City, Missouri. In Arroll, Missouri, my dad got into the lumber business. He was a lumber manufacturer and so we moved around quite a bit. After Arroll, we moved to Gower, Missouri. I went to school there for a couple of years. Then we moved back to Birch Tree, Missouri, no, Thomasville, wasn't it, first? Thomasville, Missouri. After Thomasville, we moved to West Plains, Missouri.

McCreery: Now, why did you move around so much for the lumber business?

Gauer: My dad, he bought tracts of timber. The reason we moved to Gower, Missouri, is because my mother's [Bittie E. Maddox Parvin] family, her mother and father, lived in Gower, and she wanted to be near them. My dad was moving around so much that he thought it was best that we moved up there for a while. Then that didn't work out too well, so we moved back to Thomasville, Missouri. He had a tract of timber there. He also had a farm there that he farmed, or he hired someone to farm it. After that, he moved down to Arkansas, bought timber down in Arkansas. Then he built dry kills. He moved to Evening Shade, Arkansas, and he was the mayor of Evening Shade before he passed away. He was more or less semi-retired.

McCreery: You said he built dry kills? I'm not sure I understand that.

Gauer: That's to dry lumber. He sold a lot of flooring, and he joined the Ozark Land and Lumber Company.

McCreery: Did he talk about his work very much?

Gauer: Well, we were right in it. I used to fire his dry kills at night. That's where I learned to drive cars. I drove trucks and tractors and whatever he had that I could sneak in and get! [laughter]

McCreery: How young did you start driving these things?

Gauer: About ten. Then, I don't know where we moved after that. I went to school at West Plains. Then we moved down to Evening Shade and Melbourne. We moved to Melbourne before Evening Shade. Here comes my daughter.

McCreery: Okay, we can turn this off and start again in a few minutes if we need to.

Gauer: I went to school at Melbourne.

[tape interruption]



Gauer: I went to high school in Salem. Then, when we moved to Melbourne, I went to school in Melbourne. After that, I didn't go to school anymore. After I finished the tenth grade, that was it. I was supposed to start in eleventh, but I got married.

McCreery: Oh, okay. Well, you really did move around a lot.

Gauer: Yes. I got married several times, too. [laughter]

McCreery: Oh, did you? Okay. Well, when you said you were helping your dad in his business, what exactly did you do?

Gauer: Well, you know how you fire a boiler, you have to keep the steam pressure up so high, and you have to keep it at that level. My dad lived up on the hill from there, and if he didn't hear that pop-off valve for the steam go off, he thought my sister and I were asleep. But we didn't go to sleep, because we knew better. [laughter] So anyway, that's how we got into the lumber, and that's how I learned to do driving.

McCreery: You drove trucks?

Gauer: And tractors, and every time I could swipe his car, well, I drove a car. [laughter]

McCreery: Sounds like you liked driving. Why did you like it so much?

Gauer: Oh, I just liked it. Then my husband and I, we came to California. We hitchhiked to California, because that was before the war, and it was easy and wasn't dangerous.

McCreery: Tell me how you met him, first of all.

Gauer: He was her husband's best friend, my sister's husband's best friend, so he was going to get as close to him as he could. He asked if my older sister would marry him, and she said, "No, but Reba might." [laughter] So I married him, and I guess I lived with him for about a year out of five years, didn't I? And he was a regular bum, he was from coast to coast hopping freight trains all the time. Then he decided we would move to California.

McCreery: This was before the war?

Gauer: Yes. My dad took us down from Evening Shade to Little Rock to catch a train. We had money, you know, my dad made sure we had money. My husband decided it would be fun to hitchhike, and I went along with it. [laughter] Then, after I moved down there, the war broke out. Before then, I worked in a candy factory, Hoffman candy factory.



McCreery: Where was that?

Gauer: That was in L.A. [Los Angeles]

McCreery: Okay, now what part of L.A. did you move to?

Gauer: When I first went there, I moved to Sherman Oaks. I had a sister that lived there. Then I moved to--I don't know what direction Figueroa St. would be, but it was up that area, around Figueroa and Main. I worked in that candy factory until they started hiring women on the streetcars in L.A., and then I got a job as a conductorette on the street cars.

McCreery: Do you remember what year that was?

Gauer: In '42. I worked there, and that's where I met my second husband.

McCreery: Tell me, where did you go to get this job? Do you remember how you got it?

Gauer: Just went to the main office and applied for it.

McCreery: They were hiring a lot of people then, because of the war?

Gauer: Yes. But I couldn't work the front end because I was too young to work at the front end.

McCreery: How old did you have to be?

Gauer: You had to be twenty-one, I think, then.

McCreery: How old were you then?

Gauer: Well, '42, how old was I? Twenty-one? I was born in '21, and this was in '42. I wasn't twenty-one yet, anyway.

McCreery: But maybe almost.

Gauer: Yes. Then the man I married, he was a motorman. He moved to Spokane, Washington, so I moved up there, too.

McCreery: How did you meet him, on the streetcar?





Gauer: On the streetcar. I got a divorce after I moved up to Spokane. I went to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and got a divorce, because my brother lived in Coeur d'Alene, and I could have residence there, see. Then I started working in shipyards, building aircraft carriers.

McCreery: Oh, my goodness. Before you tell me that, could I get you to tell me a little more about the streetcars in L.A.? Because I'm interested in what that job was like.

Gauer: Well, yes. I had one incident I always remembered. They had what they called "sowbelly streetcars." You entered in the middle of the streetcar and exited there. So there was a guy on the streetcar who had a gun, and he was threatening the people with it. So I just gave the motorman three bells, you know, emergency stop, and I jumped off of that streetcar! All my passengers--some woman says, "Now, you're the conductorette. That man's got a gun. You'd better go back there and get it." So I jumped off of the streetcar and all my passengers followed me. [laughter] That's about the most I remember about working the streetcars down there, because that stood out.

McCreery: What exactly was your job as the conductorette? You weren't driving it, but you were in the center of the car?

Gauer: Yes, I was collecting the fares and giving out information. That was my job.

McCreery: Now, what did you wear?

Gauer: I wore a navy blue uniform and a cap. We had to wear a cap.

McCreery: Maybe you even have a picture of yourself from then? Do you have a picture?

Gauer: No, I never had a picture made of it.

McCreery: Do you remember, did they provide the uniform, or did you have to buy it?

Gauer: No, I think we bought those uniforms, then, as best I remember.

McCreery: Now, where all did the streetcars run? Was it mostly in the downtown area?

Gauer: I worked Vernon and Vermont most of the time, and that was from--it's been so long I can't even remember. Anyway, it went north and south, and east and west, whichever way Vernon and Vermont went. I don't remember whether they're east or west because I don't remember a whole lot about L.A.



McCreery: Do you remember how long would one whole run take, one whole route?

Gauer: It'd take about two hours.

McCreery: What was the fare?

Gauer: Ten cents, I think. Ten and seven, same as it was up here at that time.

McCreery: How did you like that job, the conductorette?

Gauer: I liked it all right, but I was so young and really wasn't settled then. Then after I came up here, I started working the streetcars up here. A man by the name of Penso hired me.

McCreery: At Key Route?

Gauer: For Key System. He didn't want to hire me, because he said they didn't have any luck with these young women. But C. N. Anderson, I think that he was general manager or something at that time--he finally made president--but he told him anyone who had any experience, to hire them. That was in 1944. This Penso gave me a test, you know. He didn't think I'd pass the test, but I did. [laughter]

McCreery: Tell me about the test.

Gauer: Well, I don't remember a whole lot about it. It was mostly about making change, and fares, and very simple questions, as far as I was concerned. Anyway, after that, I started breaking in. He hired me then, after that. After that, he'd get on my bus, I was working the buses by then, and he'd get on my bus up around the medical center. He'd say, "Are you still here? I didn't think you'd ever last this long!" [laughter]

McCreery: You really proved him wrong, didn't you? You say you started on the streetcars, even here at the Key System.

Gauer: Yes, I was old enough. They didn't have conductorettes on the trains, and I started working the front end then. It's just a one-man streetcar.

McCreery: But you were already used to the driver's seat, weren't you, from all that driving growing up?

Gauer: Yes.



McCreery: Now, before we started taping, you were telling me a little bit about the training they put you through. Can you describe that again? When you first started driving?

Gauer: Well, I just broke in on one line, because I knew most of the lines, you know, because of the streetcars. So they just put me up on Alcatraz, the bus route up on Alcatraz. Then they put me on Broadway one day, and Telegraph one day, and that was it. I didn't break in any time at all on that.

McCreery: Do you remember the number of that route?

Gauer: The Alcatraz? The K line.

McCreery: K Line? Your sister's nodding, so that must be right.

Gauer: The Broadway, that was the 6 line. I remember when they started motorizing. Then they motorized the Number 5 streetcar line, and that was the Number 5 line.

McCreery: Let's go back to the streetcar for just a minute. Tell me, what time of day did you work?

Gauer: I usually worked the mid-day.

McCreery: Where were you living at the time?

Gauer: I was living on Twenty-ninth Street in Oakland.

McCreery: How did you get to work?

Gauer: I took the streetcar!

McCreery: Just wondering. [laughter]

Gauer: Then later, I bought a car. I bought a Buick and I took that, drove it back and forth, especially after I started working late at night. When I retired, I was working the A line on Twelfth Street at midnight, went on at midnight and got off at eight in the morning. I even worked the 40 line, went out to East Oakland then. I worked that on the midnight shift, too.

McCreery: How did you get on the night shift?

Gauer: I was a night person anyway. I had fired that boiler at nighttime. [laughter] I was just really a nighttime person.



McCreery: How many streetcar routes did they have when you first started, compared to the trains and buses and so on? Were there very many streetcars?

Gauer: Well, I worked out of 51<sup>st</sup> and Telegraph, and they had a streetcar barn over at Second Avenue. But I never worked those lines out of Second Avenue. After I started working on the buses, then I worked those lines.

McCreery: When you switched to the buses, what was that like for you to make the change?

Gauer: It was just the same old thing, really.

McCreery: Not that different?

Gauer: Not that different. Fares and everything were just about the same, only then we had second fares out in East Oakland. But when I started, we didn't have any automatic shift buses. Everything was manual.

McCreery: So you had to do the signals?

Gauer: And you had to double-clutch and everything. When I'd get off of the bus my clutch leg was so weak, because we had air clutches, and I'd just go down on that one leg because it was so tired.

McCreery: Yes, if you drive that long. How long were the shifts, about? Was it usually eight hours?

Gauer: Yes. Then the state made a law that we couldn't work over eight hours, you know. Then they got that changed to where we could work ten hours.

McCreery: Mr. Penso, did you say, hired you?

Gauer: Yes.

McCreery: Who was he, exactly?

Gauer: He was a teacher up at Berkeley High School. He just worked part time for Key System.

McCreery: He was some kind of a supervisor?

Gauer: He was in personnel, in the hiring department. After they motorized, I started driving a bus all the time. When they first had streetcars and buses, well, one sign-up I'd go on the buses,





and the next sign-up I'd sign back on the streetcars. But I did that only once or twice, and then I went back to the buses.

McCreery: I think it was around 1946 that National City Lines bought the Key System. Do you remember very much about when that happened?

Morgan: National City Lines didn't take over till after I had worked. National City Lines still owned it when I started working there, because I worked there and they still had it. It was in the sixties, I thought, that they had taken over.

Gauer: AC Transit took over in 1960. I have a button that we wore in my suitcase in there.

McCreery: When they changed it?

Gauer: It was from '60 to '80, after their twenty years, [I got the button].

McCreery: But I'm thinking of National City Lines. Did anything change very much when they took over the Key System?

Gauer: No, not with National City Lines. The only thing that changed was when they went to AC from National City Lines. That's when it changed. Before then, you had to be polite. You could not talk back to a passenger. You'd get time off for it, or you'd get fired for it. They never put up with anything like that. And if you had an accident, like a rear-end, you were following too close. You might as well just go turn your stuff in, because you were fired then, with that type of accident. Then when AC took over, well, you could do anything. I've never seen so many rude drivers in all my life after AC took over.

Morgan: Teamsters.

Gauer: They got by with anything, it seems like. I'd ride somebody else's bus and hear them talk to the passengers; I couldn't believe they were that rude.

McCreery: Why do you think it changed so much?

Gauer: Because the penalties were so lax. They did anything and the union stood back of them. They couldn't fire them. If they fired them, they hired them back, and then the company would have to pay for the time they were off. If they were off a week or two, well, the company had to pay their salary. So many of them really deserved to be fired, but the union would get them back to work.



McCreery: Of course, the big difference under AC Transit was it was a public company, and before it was private.

Gauer: Yes, the public thought, "Well, we own it, so we can do anything or say anything we want to." And the drivers thought, "Well, I own it too, because I'm part of the public." [laughter]

McCreery: What did you think?

Gauer: I thought just like the old Key System and the National City Lines thought. I never talked back to a passenger. I tried to treat them the way I wanted to be treated. But then, well, we'll get to that later, the County Connection.

But when I was working the streetcars--I have to tell you this. This was during the war days. I was working the Number 6 line on College Avenue, and there was a man got on my streetcar. I was married to Harold Eaves at that time. He was a supervisor for Greyhound Lines. I had the car, and so he caught my streetcar, because it was my turn-in trip, when I went into the barn. He was standing up in the corner, because the streetcar was really crowded. You didn't go down through town without getting a standing load.

Most of the people, a lot of them, had got off, and it was kind of clear. This man, he was walking up and down the aisle. He was drunk. He was just a'cussin' all the people and calling them a bunch of parasites. He walked up to the front of the streetcar to get off, and my husband said to him, "Well, fella, why don't you just go home and sleep it off?" Harold never got it out of his mouth till that guy hit him right in the nose, and the blood just flew. So when that happened, I took the brake handle off, and I took that, and I hammered him over the head with it!

Two sailors came up and took it out of my hand and shoved him off of the streetcar. [laughter] I went into the yard, you know, and of course I had blood on me, too, and somebody asked me what happened. So I tell them, "I didn't have any bit of sense," and tell them what happened, which is a good thing. I should have. So I didn't make out an accident report or anything. I didn't have any witnesses or nothing. They called me in the next day, the superintendent. I think it was Alviso. I don't remember who it was.

Morgan: Nick Alviso?

Gauer: Nick Alviso. Anyhow, he told me I had to go down and see the president of the company, which was C. N. Anderson, before I could go back to work. So I went down to see him. Mr. Anderson told me, "Did you know that that man could sue us for everything we got?" And I said, "Did you know that my husband could sue you for everything you got?" [laughter] So



he told me, "Well, you go back to work today and see if you can get some witnesses." It was before my shift, so I was down at Capwell's. I was doing some shopping before I went to work. There was three women run up to me--I had my uniform on, see--and say, "You were the lady that was operating the streetcar yesterday when that man gave us such a bad time. He was walking up there and calling us parasites." They gave me their names right there. After I went to work, well, I got three or four more names, too. Then I made out my report and turned it in.

McCreery: How was your husband at the end of all this?

Gauer: He was laughing about it. He was calling me "champ" for being a fighter. [laughter]

McCreery: He wasn't hurt too bad?

Gauer: No, just a bloody nose. [laughter] I always remember that on the streetcars. That was my biggest day.

##

McCreery: Did you have very many incidents like that, where you had to kind of deal with the passengers?

Gauer: Yes, I had an incident after I drove a bus in East Oakland. I was working the Foothill line. Then we had two-way radios. We could call central dispatch. A couple of guys were fighting on the bus, or trying to pick a fight. They walked up to the front of the bus, and I had picked up my phone to call in, and they told me that if I didn't want my pretty face messed up, I better put that phone down. So I put the phone down, and they got off there. When they got off, they threw some kind of tool up against the windshield and broke the windshield on the bus. Then I called in and reported it. Then I had to make out a report on that, too. That was about the only incident I ever had, after that, and that was when I was working that graveyard shift.

One time I was working the graveyard shift, and that was after I had married Mr. Gauer [William T. Gauer]. He was working central dispatch, and when I got to Fruitvale, there's a service station there, and I had to go to the restroom, because I was getting kind of sleepy. So I went in there to wash my face and go to the restroom. Then when I got back on the bus, well, I went on. I was fine after that. But anyway, my husband got a call to say that the bus driver on the Foothill line was drunk. [laughter] So my husband told the supervisor to go out and check that schedule. He looked up the schedule and he saw it was my schedule. He said, "She's not drunk, she's sleepy." [laughter] He said, "She doesn't even drink." So then he



called me on the air, and he said, "Are you sleepy?" I said, "Well, I was, but I'm not now." I said, "I stopped at Fruitvale and went in and washed my face and walked around a little and got woke up."

McCreery: It comes in handy to be married to the dispatcher, huh?

Gauer: It did because he knew what was happening.

McCreery: How did you meet Mr. Gauer?

Gauer: He was a supervisor. No, first he was a bus driver, and I didn't have my car, and so he picked me up and took me to work. He worked the night shift, too. He worked the graveyard shift. So he picked me up and took me to work with him. I rode back and forth to work with him. Then, after that, well, my husband and I separated. My husband that I was married to that worked for Greyhound, he drank a lot. So I left him and moved in with [my sister]. She and I were living together, and I started going with him. After that, he made supervisor, and then after that, he made superintendent.

McCreery: Oh, really? So you both had a long career in the district?

Gauer: Yes, a hundred and seven years, all four of us had, when that picture was taken.

McCreery: All the family members. We're looking at [the picture of] when you got your thirty-year driver award, I guess it was, in the *Transit Times* for April '82. You say it was you and your sister and your husband and your son.

Gauer: Actually, I got that before '82, because I had two years after I got the safe driving award. Because I got a thirty-two year patch after I got this thirty year award.

McCreery: I want to go back to something you said before. You were talking about knowing someone down in L.A. when you were conductorette.

Gauer: Harold Davis.

McCreery: Right. Tell me how you met him down there.

Gauer: He was a streetcar operator. I didn't really know him, I just knew him when I saw him, and that was all. When National City Lines took over, he came up here.

McCreery: Was he already here when you started driving the streetcars here?





Gauer: No.

McCreery: He came later?

Gauer: He came later. He came after I started driving a bus. He started working for National City Lines.

McCreery: What kind of job did he have when he first came, do you know? Was he a manager already?

Gauer: He was a manager then.

Morgan: Assistant to the president.

McCreery: Assistant to the president, you think?

Gauer: He used to run around with her.

Morgan: He used to go with me.

McCreery: Oh, okay. You're saying your sister used to go out with him. What kind of a guy was he, just from when you knew him then?

Gauer: He was nice, really had a great personality.

Morgan: Really a nice person.

Gauer: He was a very nice person. He's my son's godfather. That's where he got the name Michael, because Harold's name was Michael, wasn't it? I think it was part of it.

McCreery: When you were driving the buses here for Key System, or National City Lines, what kinds of routes did you have at that point?

Gauer: Well, mostly San Francisco routes, from Berkeley to San Francisco.

McCreery: How many times a day would you go across the bridge?

Gauer: Five. Five times. Then, the trains went on the lower deck, too, and we had three lanes of traffic for the trucks and buses. We were not allowed to pass three abreast. If a truck or a bus was meeting us, coming on the other lane, and we were trying to pass, and we were meeting three abreast, that was a dismissal right there. That was it.



McCreery: That was a safety concern? Why did they have that rule?

Gauer: That was safety, yes.

McCreery: Were there a lot of specific rules like that?

Gauer: Oh, yes, there was a lot of rules. I tried to abide by them. I even, after AC took over, then the buses went on the bottom deck, and the cars went one way, like it is now.

McCreery: This is pretty old, the date on it is January 1, 1940, but it's a rules and regulations book for Key System. Did they give you anything like that?

Gauer: Oh, yes.

McCreery: That may have been for a train operator, I'm not sure what that's from. How did they give you all the rules?

Gauer: We had a book, but I don't know whether it's like this or not because the trains were different. They had different rules than we did. On the streetcars, as far as the rules on switches and everything, they were the same. If you were going to the point of a switch, you stopped at the point of a switch because you had to turn that switch--it might be at a crossover--to go on the other side, so you stopped at the corner. I remember that.

McCreery: Where were some of those points, for example, where the railroad tracks were?

Gauer: One I remember real well was at University and Shattuck. The reason I remember that is because there was another streetcar came in behind me, and she was supposed to be out ahead of me, because it was two different lines came in there. So, I had to go take the crossover so she could get by. Well, she didn't stop at the point of that switch, and she split that switch and ran right into my streetcar and knocked me back against the handrail and broke this front tooth out, broke it, killed the nerve in it. I remember that real well. That was before AC took over, that was National City Lines.

McCreery: You think that happened at University and Shattuck there?

Gauer: Yes, it did.

McCreery: Did you drive a lot of the students in that area near the university?



Gauer: Oh, yes, I broke in a lot of the students, too, [new drivers, not college students] and my sister did, too. Then, after so long, they started really hiring a lot of people. I was working the D line, which went to Martinez and Dublin.

McCreery: Oh, that's quite a ways.

Gauer: Sometimes, I'd have three students at one time, breaking them in on the line, you know. Telling them where all the transfer points and all that.

McCreery: Were you a good teacher?

Gauer: Well, I guess I was, some of them were still there, last I knew. [laughter] Some of those students really scared me to death, driving. [laughter] After a while, they got better.

McCreery: Tell me what you remember about the college students demonstrating on your routes.

Gauer: Oh, yes, they were demonstrating against the Vietnam War.

McCreery: Were they blocking the street? How did it affect your driving?

Gauer: Yes. Because I was working the Grove Street line, and they were trying to stop the streetcar. You had to stop, you couldn't run over them. I guess the police had to get them away. I don't remember, it was so long ago. You forget a lot of those things, you know, after so long. Up in Berkeley, I used to get such a kick out of these people, these students, you know, from the university. They'd get on the bus there at Durant and Telegraph, and they'd want tokens. You'd give them the tokens, they'd drop the dollar in the fare box and throw the tokens out the door, because they were reading, you know? [laughter]

McCreery: What did you say to them?

Gauer: I just laughed. I'd tell them to get out and pick up the tokens. The tokens, I had to account for, because we were selling the tokens to them. We had to account for those tokens. That was funny. I thought, "Boy, these intellectuals."

McCreery: Yes, that's a student for you, not thinking at all!

Gauer: Now, my husband, he never had a high school education either, but he made superintendent. A woman made superintendent too, and she was just like me. She just went through the tenth grade and that was it. I guess we must have had a pretty good education, because we learned more in those days than they do now. I don't know.



McCreery: I wanted to ask you, because you're talking about the woman superintendent. Just starting back when you first joined the Key System, I know they were hiring a lot of women.

Gauer: She was a dispatcher then. When I first started, she was a streetcar operator. Then she went in the office as a dispatcher and a receiver, which--she counted all our money. Then, she started working as a secretary. She left Fifty-first and Telegraph and went over to Second Avenue. Then after that, she came back up to Division Two, which was Forty-fifth and San Pablo, and she was an assistant to the superintendent there. Then, after my husband started as a superintendent, she was working in the office as a clerk, doing all the inside office work. My husband, he made assistant superintendent, and they had a superintendent, Goodman. My husband told me--Mojeski was her name at that time; later, her name was Gross--my husband told me that she taught him and Goodman everything they knew about transportation.

McCreery: Is that right?

Gauer: Yes. She was really on the ball. She just passed away, when was it, New Year's?

McCreery: Oh, is that Mo Gross? I've heard the name.

Gauer: Yes. Where she got the name of "Mo" was from Mojeski. She was my son's godmother.

McCreery: Oh, my, that's wonderful. But your husband and the other guy said she taught them everything they knew. That's very interesting.

Gauer: About being a superintendent. Of course, they were supervisors, both of them, before.

McCreery: Right, so they were experienced.

Gauer: And they both worked in central dispatch. So they knew transportation, but she taught them that office, how to operate that office. But she made superintendent later. What's that?

Morgan: My card from the Amalgamated Transit Union.

McCreery: Well, actually I would like to talk a little bit about the union. I know that when you start driving, you're a member automatically, is that right? How did that work?

Gauer: You have to sign up for the union for the company.

Morgan: That's the way it was when I started.





- Gauer: But I've got more time, and they never did send me one of those. Did they take union dues out of your pension?
- Morgan: Yes, I've never presented them with this or anything.
- McCreery: Were you ever active in the union?
- Gauer: Only just to be, you know, a driver. You know, when they started hiring women as supervisors, everybody said, "Reba, why don't you be a supervisor?" I said, "Because I don't have what it takes to try to correct a driver."
- McCreery: Really? Now what made you say that?
- Gauer: Because you have to make out reports on them, where you correct the driver. You have to make out a report on them and turn it in to the main office, you know. Well, I just wasn't that type of person.
- Morgan: You make lots of enemies.
- Gauer: You make lots of enemies. When my husband was a supervisor, the drivers just hated him. When he made superintendent, they thought there was nothing like him. [laughter]
- McCreery: That's a very interesting lesson, isn't it?
- Gauer: The same with these two, these guys right here. They were all supervisors before they made superintendent.
- McCreery: You're looking at the picture of when you retired, is that what this is? In *Transit Times*?
- Gauer: Yes. The drivers just hated them. But if they made superintendent, it was altogether different. The supervisor was always right, but the superintendent always would kind of give the driver the benefit of the doubt. He listened to their story.
- McCreery: Now, you had already worked the streetcars in L.A., but I'm wondering, when you came here, I know they were hiring a lot of women because the war was on, but what was it like for the women to come into the Key System?
- Gauer: I had come from working in the shipyards in Vancouver, Washington, and I started working at Number Two shipyard. I was a certified welder.



McCreery: You worked here in the shipyard also? In Richmond?

Gauer: Yes. A very short time, and I was riding these streetcars, riding the bus down to Ashby Avenue and catching a streetcar, and there's always, every once in a while, there might be a woman operating the streetcar. So I just found out how to go about it, and I went down and put in my application.

McCreery: How many women were there hiring on as drivers at that time?

Gauer: Well, they was hiring streetcar operators, but I don't know whether they'd hired women on the buses at that time or not. I don't remember that far back. But I know after I started working the streetcars, I did see two or three women working on the buses.

McCreery: You just found out how to apply, and you knew you liked driving and everything?

Gauer: Yes, and I still like it! I hear an old bus go by, and just get so--I really get antsy, you know. And when I made thirty years of safe driving, I was made citizen of the--what is that radio station in San Francisco that plays old music all the time? I don't remember, but I got a deal on that, but I couldn't find it to bring it today. Then, they had the write-ups in all the papers, in the *Contra Costa Times*. They also had it in the *Tribune*. But I couldn't find it. I have so much stuff packed away at my sister's, where I live down south. I couldn't find all these articles.

Gauer: AC Transit told me [I was the only woman in the United States to retire with over three million miles of safe driving]. They told me they had never heard of anyone else. They got the transit papers, you know, from across the country, and they had never heard of it before. Whether it was true or not, I don't know.

McCreery: But somebody counted up your miles and decided you had three million. Now, why do you think you were such a good driver?

Gauer: I guess because I liked it so well. [laughter]

McCreery: Well, that helps, doesn't it?

Gauer: Yes. I carried both of my children while I was still working. I got so big, I'd walk up the aisle to pick up my hat checks, and if my rear end didn't knock their arms off the arm rests, my stomach did! [laughter]

McCreery: It got a little crowded!



Gauer: Yes. It was fun. I'd always wear my jacket, and some of them couldn't even tell. They asked me where I carried that baby.

McCreery: Because you surprised them?

Gauer: Yes, I surprised them.

McCreery: Was that rare then, to work through a pregnancy, like that?

Gauer: I guess it was. Not too many people got pregnant. They'd retire. They'd quit, you know? But I didn't, I just kept right on working.

McCreery: I wonder why you liked it so much?

Gauer: I don't know. I just liked working with the public, so that was probably the reason.

McCreery: I bet you got to know all your passengers.

Gauer: Oh, yes. Then, after, they started working out in the county. My sister was the first driver that ever took a bus out to go out to Brentwood from Forty-fifth and San Pablo.

McCreery: Oh, when they started working in Contra Costa.

Gauer: Yes. Then, I started after she did. In fact, I bumped her off of the run she was working.  
[laughter]

McCreery: Because you had the seniority? Uh-oh.

Gauer: Then after I started working out in the county, I just kept working out here until I got ready to retire.

McCreery: I want to ask you the same question I asked you about L.A., which is about the uniforms. What did you wear driving? I'm thinking right now of the Key System days. What was the uniform?

Gauer: It was similar to the Key System uniform, only it had L.A. Railway on your sleeve, where it had Key System on there. The uniforms we had later, they were kind of a green.

McCreery: Did you have to buy those yourself? How did that work?



Gauer: When we first started we did, we had to, but then the union got to where the company had to buy them.

McCreery: So later on, they would provide them.

Gauer: They would provide us with so many slacks a year and one jacket and so many shirts a year. Wilma and I, we always wore the long jackets. Some of the drivers would have the short jackets, you know. Mojeski, she always told the drivers to get the long jackets like Wilma and Reba wore, because they looked much nicer than those short ones.

McCreery: Did you agree with that?

Gauer: Yes.

Morgan: What they looked like was an army officer's uniform, with the jacket.

McCreery: Now what about keeping your time? I know that on these routes, you have to make certain stops at certain times. Tell me a little bit about how that worked.

Gauer: Well, they'd always tell me, the supervisors always said, "If Reba can't keep that schedule, it can't be kept."

McCreery: That's a nice compliment.

Gauer: Yes, it was.

McCreery: How did you do that?

Gauer: I just put my mind to keeping that schedule, and I always did. I'd say, "Step right up, please. Step right up, please." [laughter]

McCreery: That's how you'd move the passengers along a little faster?

Gauer: "Let's move to the rear of the bus, please." That's the way I kept them moving.

McCreery: Did you like to talk a lot, when your passengers were getting on and off?

Gauer: No. I always told them, "Good day." When they got off, "Have a nice day."

McCreery: Were there rules about talking to the passengers?





Gauer: Oh, yes. You didn't talk to the passengers when you were driving. Fact is, I got called in for that one time.

McCreery: Oh, you did? What did you do?

Gauer: Fact is, I had to go see my husband. [laughter] He was supervisor then and he wrote me up for it, so I had to go see the superintendent. He said, "It's because you were talking to that man, and your husband was jealous." [laughter] Because this man had a baby about the same age as my daughter was, and so we'd talk about our babies, you know, our kids. Mr. Trathen was superintendent then. He told me, "I think Bill was just jealous." It sounds like it.

McCreery: In general, you weren't supposed to talk to the passengers very much?

Gauer: Well, this guy was the last one to get off of this bus, out on Foothill, and I was working the graveyard shift. My husband was the supervisor on the graveyard shift, and he was following me, see. When that guy started to get off, he stood beside the bus and talked to me for a little while. So my husband wrote me up for deliberately delaying a schedule.

McCreery: So he witnessed the whole thing, and that's how he knew it happened?

Gauer: Yes. Then, when he wrote me up, Mr. Trathen called me in, you know? I guess about the only time I ever was wrote up was by him, by my husband. [laughter]

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McCreery: Are you thinking of something else you wanted to tell me?

Gauer: Yes. When I was driving the F line across the bridge, well, he took care of the kids in the morning.

McCreery: Your husband did?

Gauer: I worked days then, and he took care of the kids, and he brought my daughter [Norma Sue Gauer] out and put her on the bus, because I just had one trip to make. He put her on the bus, so when she got home she told him, she said, "Dad, you're going to have to get on to Mom. She was going ninety miles an hour across that Bay Bridge." [laughter]

McCreery: Did she say that?

Gauer: She was looking at the air pressure instead of the speedometer. [laughter]



McCreery: Do you remember how old was she then?

Gauer: She was little, five or six years old. She was going to school though. Kindergarten, I think she was going to.

McCreery: So she tattled on you?

Gauer: She tattled on me. [laughter] He just laughed, because he knew what had happened. The buses wouldn't go that fast and he knew it.

Then I got turned in one time by the safety engineer that had the green cross on the side of his car. I was working the D line and I had just pulled out of the yard. I had a bus that evidently didn't have any governors on it, or the speedometer was wrong. It only registered fifty-five miles an hour. This guy drove along beside me and I looked over at him and smiled, because I was passing everything on the road. [laughter] So he, my husband called me in for that. He was superintendent then. He called me in and told me what this guy reported. Well, I'd already told my husband that the bus wouldn't go more than fifty-five miles an hour, but that's all it registered. I didn't tell him that was all it would register, but I said, "I pass everything on the road with that bus." So then he told his assistant, "I want you to go out and check that bus and see what the speedometer says." Grandison was his assistant then, George Grandison. Now he's general manager for Fresno Transit. He came back and told Bill, "No, it only registers fifty-five miles an hour. They checked it in the shop, and it registered fifty-five." He said, "Well, go in there and tell Mo to write up an adverse letter and put in her file." So George came back in and says, "Bill, you shouldn't do that. That's what the bus registered, was fifty-five. She shouldn't have an adverse letter." He said, "Yes, she should, because she knew it was going faster. She's drove long enough to know that." [laughter]

McCreery: He saw you go by smiling?

Gauer: Yes. But anyway, after that they never did do anything to that bus. And after that, that one bus was assigned to that run of mine. Then they tried to assign certain buses to certain runs. Everybody said, "That's Reba's bus." If I had a day off or anything, he said the drivers just fought to have that bus. He said they liked to drive that bus because it was so easy to keep a schedule with it. I was working the D line, and we had a terrible time keeping schedules on that D line. I would get into the BART station and I'd miss my connection with the train, you know? Because the passengers knew what time the train left and what time the bus was due there. I would tell them, "I cannot make that schedule." That's when they told him that if I couldn't make it, nobody could. So they sent this guy right here--what's his name, Gene Cota--they sent him out. He was supervisor then. No, he wasn't, what was he?



Morgan: He was a supervisor.

Gauer: Anyway, they sent him out to ride with me to see if the schedule could be made. He went and told them, no, it couldn't be made, it was just too fast. He would follow me, and he would try, he said, "She don't waste any time, but that schedule can't be made." Then they did the schedule over again so that you could make it.

McCreery: How much time did they add, do you remember?

Gauer: Oh, seven or eight minutes.

McCreery: That's quite a lot.

Gauer: Yes. Well, anyway, they got it where it was possible to make it.

McCreery: Did they change the schedules very often?

Gauer: Only if there was a problem with them. Every other driver that drove on the D line would tell them the same thing. They finally changed it to where you could make it. Cota, he stood behind me. He said, "No, it can't be made."

McCreery: What kind of routes did you like? Did you like the commutes to San Francisco, or the local ones?

Gauer: I liked the San Francisco fine.

McCreery: Why?

Gauer: I don't know why, I just liked the different--I worked early morning then. I liked the passengers, you know, because they were working people, going to work over in the city. I liked that, because they worked with the public, too, all the time. Then after I drove out here, [in Contra Costa County,] the traffic was so much better out here, you know. It wasn't congested like it is in the Bay Area. So I liked driving out here, then, after that.

McCreery: What were some of the routes you drove out here?

Gauer: Oh, I drove the D line, and I drove Brentwood to the BART station in Concord. And then that line, when it got to the BART station, it changed to the M line, which was Martinez, and you went all the way to Martinez and back to the BART station. Then you changed to the P line, which was Pittsburgh, Brentwood, out that way.



McCreery: Let's talk about BART for a minute. How did that change your job, when the BART started running in 1972?

Gauer: Well, it really didn't change our job a whole lot.

McCreery: There was this whole thing of coordinating the bus lines with the BART schedule and everything.

Gauer: Well, there was always so many more buses coming in than there were BART trains, at first. Then later, people started taking the BART. I think, since the BART's got so high in price-- to go from here, how much is it to San Francisco? About five dollars.

McCreery: That's pretty expensive. Well, what did the drivers think of this whole idea of bringing in BART? It just covered the old Key routes.

Gauer: Really, they didn't particularly like it.

McCreery: Why?

Gauer: Well, they had problems with BART at first.

McCreery: Yes, getting it going?

Gauer: Yes, getting it going. I know one driver who told me some guy got on griping about BART, and [the driver] was griping about AC, you know. The guy said, "Well, old GMC, they've been operating for a long time. We never had any problems."

McCreery: Because you're thinking that the buses were a good, reliable system, is that the idea?

Gauer: Yes.

Morgan: They repair those trains right out here on Loverage.

McCreery: The BART trains, you're talking about?

Morgan: Yes, they repair them there.

McCreery: Do you think it changed the commuting patterns very much, though?





Gauer: It did with routes that go to San Francisco, but not from Berkeley. Not in downtown, it hasn't changed much.

McCreery: Now, working with different supervisors and so on--you mentioned your husband was one of those, and then later made superintendent. Do you think there were any differences for the women drivers in this whole system? Did you think about that very much?

Gauer: No. There wasn't very many women supervisors when I was driving. They had just made a few at that time, maybe two or three.

McCreery: What kinds of things did you have to think about that the men didn't have to think about? What kinds of differences can you tell me?

Gauer: Well, I always felt that we were the same, you know. We did the same work, drew the same pay.

McCreery: Did you ever have any problems?

Gauer: Never had any problems with supervisors. Never had any problems with superintendents, even. I worked under every superintendent they had. Never had any problems. I think Martin was the superintendent when I first started. His last name was Martin. I don't remember too much about him, because I really never had any dealings with him.

McCreery: What about working this night shift? Did you have any concerns about doing that?

Gauer: Well, everybody got held up on the night shift but me. Well, I'll tell you why I didn't. I had a day off, and the guy got held up out in San Leandro at the end of the line. But when I was working, the San Leandro police met me at the end of the line, every trip.

McCreery: Is that right? Isn't that nice.

Gauer: Yes, and I never did get held up. She got held up in the division, Wilma did.

Morgan: Well, they got maybe three thousand and some dollars, and they tied us up, six of us.

Gauer: She had her rings on, see. She took them off and stuck them down her bra. [laughter]

McCreery: Well, you knew you'd keep them that way. I'm sorry to hear that happened.

Morgan: They took us from room to room and tied us up.



Gauer: They were black, you know. They asked my sister to describe them. She told them, "Well, they didn't have blue eyes." [laughter] That was her description of them, "They didn't have blue eyes."

McCreery: That must have been scary.

Morgan: It was scary. It was a shock.

McCreery: Was anybody hurt?

Morgan: Not that time, but before, they beat some of them up, before I was robbed then. I got it three times, and you don't get over it, either. You're leery all the time then, even after I quit working.

Gauer: The blessing was when we didn't handle money [anymore]. That was the blessing that started. Because we didn't handle any money. Everything went in the fare box, and they had to have the right fare. If they didn't have the right fare, they had to drop what they had in, and we'd give them a refund slip, and they had to take it down to the main office to get the refund.

McCreery: Not handling money is a big change, isn't it?

Gauer: Yes, that was really a big change. See, when I started, they had a ten-cent fare and a seven-cent fare with Key System. Twenty-one cents to go to San Francisco on the trains. We sold tickets, we sold commute books. We didn't have passes then, we sold commute books. We sold tickets to San Francisco on the streetcar, and we sold tokens. We had a lot of money, if they'd held anyone up then.

McCreery: What was the difference between the seven-cent fare and the ten cents?

Gauer: You bought tokens. You got--what, how many tokens for a dollar? I don't remember.

McCreery: But you had both those fares at the same time? Seven and ten?

Gauer: Yes. If they bought tokens, it was cheaper than the ten-cent fare.

McCreery: Oh, I see. If they paid cash.

Gauer: Yes. Then, everything that went through the fare box was registered. It registered a token, or it registered a ten-cent fare. Then when you got in, you took all the money out and put it in



your changer, because you made change. Then when you got in the yard, you had to count all that money and all your tokens and turn it in to what they called a receiver, or a dispatcher.

McCreery: And you had to be responsible for everything you took in. Did you ever have any trouble with that?

Gauer: No. Never. Never got shortages or anything. Never was given a slip for being short. A lot of drivers would get slips that said they were short so much money.

McCreery: If they were short, how was that handled? Did they have to pay it?

Gauer: Evidently, when they took the readings on the fare box, they didn't take the correct reading. There would be a shortage. Of course, they never did give overages! [laughter]

McCreery: There weren't any refunds? [laughter]

Morgan: I used to jam their fare boxes with those little meat tokens they used to have, meat tokens, you know, rations during the war? I'd get onto her streetcar and all of them and jam them, jam the fare box.

Gauer: She thought I could count my money faster then. [laughter]

McCreery: You were never off? You could have it come out even every time?

Gauer: Yes.

McCreery: That's pretty good, with all that you had to think about. Now, you talked about the one bus that would only go fifty-five miles an hour. What kinds of maintenance problems and things did you have with the buses? Did you ever have them break down on you?

Gauer: Oh, yes, had to have road calls every now and then. But never on that bus! [laughter] That was really one of the best buses.

McCreery: How did you make a road call when you had to?

Gauer: We had a telephone. Before we had telephones, if our streetcar went out, you know, we had to make a telephone call to central dispatch. Then they had company telephones at certain spots.



Morgan: That's an old Key System key.

McCreery: Oh, okay, we're looking at the key on your key ring here. What did you do with this exactly?

Gauer: That was for the telephone. It would open the telephone box, too.

Morgan: Also police and the fire, wasn't it?

Gauer: I don't know.

McCreery: What did they do with the passengers if the bus broke down?

Gauer: They'd send another bus out to pick them up. That's how they took care of it.

Morgan: You're supposed to turn these in. But I didn't turn mine in, I kept it.

Gauer: I turned mine in. I turned mine in. I was stuck, I had to. [laughter]

McCreery: What was your badge number, Mrs. Gauer?

Gauer: 1066.

McCreery: Is that right? You had the same one the whole time?

Gauer: Yes. Same one. Now, I think when I first started, my badge number was 798. I'd always tell them I was a J.C. Penney's special, 798. [laughter] Then they gave badge numbers according to seniority. I don't remember what they started out at, but mine was 1066.

McCreery: Okay, so somewhere along the line they switched the number system.

Gauer: I remember a woman who got her brasses ahead of me, hers was 1065.

McCreery: I wanted to ask you to describe for me, when you would do the San Francisco runs, what would the whole day be like? You said about five runs in a day. When would you start, and then how long in between runs?

Gauer: I'd start about 5:30 in the morning, and I'd get off around 1:30 or 2:00 o'clock. I always tried to sign on the longest runs, because we made more money on the longest runs, especially after we could work more than eight hours. Then, at first, before the union made them give us more time, our travel time and turn-in time and report time, we had to report ten





minutes before our run was due out. That was counted as time worked, but the union got it to where that wasn't counted as time worked. Then they got it as "wheel time," what we did behind the wheel, how many hours we spent behind the wheel. That way, we got in more than eight hours. We'd be getting ten or eleven hours, and that was premium time.

McCreery: So some kind of an overtime above eight hours?

Gauer: Yes. Time and a half for over eight hours.

McCreery: So you would start at 5:30 in the morning, and where would you leave from?

Gauer: Forty-fifth and San Pablo. Then I'd get off where the relief point was. The relief point wasn't at Forty-fifth and San Pablo, the relief point for the F line was at Fortieth and San Pablo. It was always where we could catch another bus to the line we were going to work.

McCreery: How many places would you pick up passengers before you crossed the bridge?

Gauer: Oh, gosh, we started out in Albany and we picked up there, and every three or four blocks there was a coach stop.

McCreery: Along San Pablo there?

Gauer: I didn't go San Pablo, I went up Solano Avenue to Shattuck and then down Shattuck to Adeline, and then Adeline to Fortieth Street, and then Fortieth to San Pablo. That was the last pickup, unless someone wanted to get on at the Bay Bridge, but the only ones that ever got on at the Bay Bridge were the toll collectors. They would get on to go home. I never remember picking up a passenger there, unless it was a police officer, and they rode for nothing anyway. But the toll people had to pay a fare.

McCreery: Then where would you go in San Francisco?

Gauer: To the East Bay Terminal.

McCreery: Was that at the same place? Was it downtown?

Gauer: First and Mission. It was where the trains used to go in, and that's where we went in.

McCreery: It was just the one stop there, then?

Gauer: Yes.



McCreery: Then was there a break, or did you immediately come back? How did that work?

Gauer: No, we had layover time there. Sometimes we had long enough to go have us a cup of coffee and go to the restroom. Sometimes we had twenty or thirty minutes there, but not too often. Usually it was about ten minutes, and that was it, wasn't it?

Morgan: You usually had to take about ten or fifteen minutes of that off of your run because you were usually late getting into San Francisco.

McCreery: Was it traffic problems then? I know you had your lanes you could use.

Gauer: There was traffic problems then, especially when all the buses and trucks went on the lower deck. We only had three lanes. Then the problem was when they took those tracks off. When they were taking those tracks off, man, the buses were really delayed getting into the city and out. Sometimes they turned us around at Fortieth and San Pablo to get us back on time. Then we'd start back and we'd get held up again, from the construction.

McCreery: How long did it take them to rip up the tracks, approximately? Do you remember?

Gauer: Probably, to take up the tracks and everything, and get it paved and everything, it probably took about a year.

McCreery: So then you would come back to the East Bay and start all over again?

Gauer: Yes, and then sometimes it would get so late that if we could make it up to Solano and San Pablo by them dead-heading us across the Bay Bridge, and go up the freeway to Solano and San Pablo, we could start out on time.

McCreery: Just for the tape, will you explain what dead-heading is?

Gauer: It's where you don't carry any passengers, you just go as fast as you can from--

McCreery: You didn't mind that, did you? [laughter]

Gauer: No.

McCreery: Did that happen very often?



Gauer: Then it did, when they were removing those tracks. Sometimes they'd send you out, and you were carrying double headway because the guy ahead of you, they deadheaded him, so you had to pick up all those people. [laughter]

Morgan: Well, guys used to get out, and they'd try to stick the women, you know--they'd really work us hard, the guys would.

McCreery: Now, why do you think they did that?

Gauer: I don't know, but one time when I was working the 40 line, I was working days, and Wilma was, too. I went in and I told my husband that I wanted them to check that guy that was my leader, because I was getting too many passengers, I couldn't haul them I was getting so many people. I could make the schedule, but I couldn't haul all the people. So, [laughter], he checked, and he said, "You know who your leader is? It's your sister." I never saw her. She was always gone by the time I got to the end of the line. [laughter]

McCreery: Sounds like she played quite a few tricks on you.

Morgan: Not really. They told me, "If you get on that line, don't ever let up on the gas, because you'll really get late." I had just started working. I hadn't been working very long, so that's exactly what I did, and she really got swamped.

Gauer: I was making the schedule and everything, it's just that I couldn't haul all the people. No one else could get on, it was so full. I even had some of them, if they could get in at the rear door, I'd let them in at the rear door, and then when they got off, they'd come up and pay their fare.

McCreery: So even your standing room was all taken. What did they do about it?

Morgan: She never did complain anymore, when she found out it was me. [laughter]

Gauer: I never complained anymore. If I wasn't making the schedule, I would have complained, but I could make the schedule, so I didn't say anything.

Morgan: I remember that even out here when I was working, people really wanted to ride with me because I waited till they would sit down. Old people, I couldn't start my bus till they sat down. I didn't want them to fall. Those guys, they gave them such a rough ride, and they'd just try to stick me with all the passengers. But I didn't care because I was only going to go to the end of the line and come back. But I always waited till they sat down.



McCreery: Yes, I bet there are a lot of differences in how people handle that part of the driving, stopping and starting and waiting for passengers.

Gauer: If I got a blind person on, I don't care if he had a cane or what he had, I got off of that bus or streetcar, and I went to whichever side of the street. If he had to cross the street, I took him across the street. I stopped and did that. I never let a blind person try to cross the street. Working Telegraph, the blind home was on Telegraph.

Morgan: Where the highway patrol is.

Gauer: When I'd get there, I knew they had to go across the street to get to that blind home, coming from Oakland. So I'd always stop and I'd take them across the street. And I could always make the schedule.

Morgan: Did you ever get that blind guy--

Gauer: --that tried to feel you up?

Morgan: He tried to rub all over me! And I held him off, and he laughed, you know?

Gauer: You would take him by the arm, and he'd try to rub your breast with his arm. I guess it gave him a thrill, I don't know! [laughter]

McCreery: Well, you've seen it all, haven't you, just about? Well, that's interesting, because in that one area you probably had a lot of blind passengers, because of the residence there. Now what about as time went on, they started having the wheelchair lifts and all that. Did you drive with that?

Gauer: Yes, but there was no problem with that. I never had any problems with it.

McCreery: Did the lifts work?

Gauer: Not all the time. If they didn't, we just called in and told them, and then they sent one of the small buses out with a lift and pick them up. Especially County Connection did that. I liked working for County Connection because all of their drivers were so polite. You never saw a driver that was discourteous. It wasn't like it was in Oakland.

##





McCreery: When we had the tape off, we were talking about the mechanical aspects of driving the bus, back in the old days. I wonder if you could just tell me a little bit about what were all the physical things you had to do? What were all the controls and things you had to be looking at?

Gauer: We never started our bus up till that air pressure got up to ninety pounds of air.

McCreery: How long would that take?

Gauer: Well, that would take at least four or five minutes, not long. Then we had to learn to open up the back end of the bus where the motor was and check our oil. If the starter didn't work, we had to know how to kick the starter to get it to work, check the fan belt, see if it wasn't loose, little things like that.

McCreery: You did that at the start of every shift? You checked your own oil and fan belt?

Gauer: No, we didn't do that, we checked the oil pressure at the beginning.

McCreery: Oil pressure, I see.

Gauer: When I worked for County Connection, we had a checklist. We had to check everything. We had to check our tires with AC, too, to see if we had any low tires or anything. We'd just kick them, you know.

McCreery: So once you were all started up and the air pressure was fine, then what else did you have to do?

Gauer: Well, when we went in to work, we had to go to the dispatcher and pick up our run. Had to be there ten minutes before time to pick up that run, or we got an oversleep. Then he gave us our transfers, he gave us what we had to have and assigned us our bus, and then we went out and got our bus and checked everything.

[tape interruption]

McCreery: You had your transfers and everything.

Gauer: We had a defect card with the bus number on it and our run number on it. Then if anything was wrong with the bus, we wrote it on that defect card and turned it in at night. If our brakes were slack, or if our steering wasn't just right, well, we wrote it on the defect card.



We didn't turn the defect card in, we left it with the bus. The mechanics, then, they picked up the defect card to see if anything was wrong with it.

McCreery: What about the steering and the brakes and actually operating the bus? Just describe that a little bit.

Gauer: Well, the brakes were nothing, you know. Of course, you had to know how to use it without jerking your passengers around. The same way with the gas, you didn't just floor-board it, you had to take it easy so the bus started up easy.

McCreery: And the clutch?

Gauer: Well, when we had clutches, yes. On the hydro-torques and hydro-matics, we didn't have any clutches. The steering, when I first started, they didn't have any power steering at all. Your steering was in your strength.

McCreery: Now, you said you're about five foot two?

Gauer: I was too short, but they hired me anyway. Same with her, they took her out to see that she could drive, then they hired her anyway. You're supposed to be five foot four.

McCreery: Was it hard to handle the steering?

Gauer: It wasn't for me. I always put the seat up as far as I could get it forward. If a man relieved me, he had to really adjust that seat, because we had it different than they did. But some of the buses then were so hard to turn, you had to just almost stand up to turn them. You had to get your feet on the floor to turn them. Then after they got power steering, they were simple. It was easy, the steering was great. If the power steering went out on your bus, well, then you road-called it, and they brought you another bus.

McCreery: Well, we did talk a little bit about your training program when you started. Tell me just a little bit more, how you had to drive. They'd put out cones and things?

Gauer: Yes.

McCreery: What were some of the things that you had to do to learn to manage the whole big bus?

Gauer: I didn't have to learn, because I already knew it, you know. But you had to go through those cones without knocking them down with the front wheel or the rear tires or anything.



McCreery: Where was this training? Where did you do this?

Gauer: I don't remember. In the yard, some of it, and then some of it down around where the racetrack is. There wasn't a racetrack there then, just an open field. We did some of it there. Then after we went through the training in the training department, that few days--it wasn't only just a few days. We went through that, then we went out on a run with other drivers, you know, to learn the routes. See, I'd worked the streetcars, so I didn't have to learn the routes, I already knew them, so that was it.

When my son started, the instructor told me, "I wish you'd tell your son to stay awake, because I don't want him going out there and getting lost." I said, "Don't worry, he won't ever get lost." Mike [Michael Ray Gauer] said, "He might think I'm asleep, but I'm not." [laughter] Mike, he went out, and he never did get lost, but really a lot of those drivers got lost.

McCreery: But he already knew those routes, didn't he?

Gauer: Yes, most of them.

McCreery: By the time he started driving--you said that was about twenty years ago? Or when did he start, do you know?

Gauer: Yes, he's forty now, and he started when he was nineteen.

McCreery: Very early eighties maybe. Now, what was the training like by the time he started?

Gauer: I don't know. I never have--probably practically the same, I think. I didn't see much difference in it. But he already knew the fundamentals. All he had to do was learn what routes that he hadn't already been over. [laughter]

McCreery: I wanted to ask you, too--sometimes over the years, the district would go out on strike.

Gauer: Yes, the union called a strike one time that the drivers didn't vote for. Well, I took my bus out anyway. The shop stewards called the president of the union and told him that there was two or three of us that went out anyway, because my husband told me that it wasn't a strike, because it wasn't sanctioned by the drivers or by the international [union]. But anyway, after that one guy called me a scab, and I said, "Well, at least I'm not gay. You're a gay guy." And he died with AIDS, too. Of course, that was after I retired. But just because I took that bus out, you know.



Gauer: I had worked out here all the time, and I knew all the lines. I'd worked out here, so I thought, "Well, I'll just go to work at County Connection." Some of the other drivers that had retired told me, "Why don't you go to work for County Connection?"

McCreery: Why did you want to work some more?

Gauer: I liked driving a bus.

McCreery: That's a good reason.

Gauer: I wanted to stay with it. If I hadn't fallen at County Connection and injured my hand--well, that was the second time I had fallen, but I didn't hurt myself the first time.

McCreery: What was the first time? Was that with AC?

Gauer: No, that was with County Connection. At County Connection, they had re-paved the pad where they parked the buses, and whoever did the pavement had left little deals sticking up. Well, one night, I stubbed my toe on one of those and I fell. Then the next time, there was a crack there, and the deal was sticking up and I stubbed my toe on it, and that's when I hurt my hand.

McCreery: The second time was pretty serious?

Gauer: Oh, yes, they took me to the hospital.

Morgan: She hit her head, too.

Gauer: I hit my head. I had a big bump on my head.

Morgan: County Connection called me.

Gauer: But they paid, County Connection paid for everything. The only thing is, when I fell, I put my hands forward and fell on my hands, and my head went between my hands, you know, and I hit my head. When I put my hands, it pushed my shoulders back so that about six months after, I started having problems right between my shoulders, with my back. But they didn't give me anything for that back, because they said that my doctor had said that I had arthritis in my shoulders. So I just let it go, and now, sometimes I can't hardly stand up, my back hurts so bad.

McCreery: That was how long ago, that you had that accident?





Gauer: Oh, that was '91.

McCreery: That was in '91? That was not too long after your hand was injured?

Gauer: Yes. They wanted me to come, they said, "We'd just be happy to have you back." But I told our superintendent, Joan was her first name, I told her, "No, Joan, if I came back, I'd probably just fall again." Because they had steps, some of the girls had fallen down those steps. I said, "I might trip my heel on one of those steps. I might fall again, and it'd just cost the company more money and I don't want to do that."

McCreery: Did you have any regrets that you didn't go back?

Gauer: No, none.

McCreery: You were ready to retire this time?

Gauer: Yes.

McCreery: What were the differences between County Connection and AC?

Gauer: Not anything, other than just like I said, that the drivers were more polite at County Connection.

McCreery: Why?

Gauer: I don't know. That's just the way they taught them. They told them, "We don't allow you to be discourteous to any passengers." They told you that in training. The fact is, we had an instructor that was a truck driver before she worked at County Connection. She was a good one, too.

McCreery: How did your son decide to start driving a bus, do you remember?

Gauer: He always, from the time he was ten years old, said he was going to be a bus driver when he graduated from high school. Just as soon as he graduated from high school, he went down and put his application in for AC Transit. Well, John Rose was taking care of the applications at that time for AC Transit, and John had had one or two of his kids started to work for AC. So Mike saw him one day, and he said, "Rose, what'd you do with my application?" He says, "Did you put in an application?" He said, "Yes." So I said to him, "John, what'd you do with Mike's application?" He said, "I don't know, Reba, I guess it's



down there in the basement someplace.” It wasn’t but a day or two till he called Mike to work.

McCreery: But you had already taught him how to do some driving, it sounds like.

Gauer: Yes, he already knew how to. That was all he knew how to do. Of course, he had a car of his own then, because his dad bought him a Trans Am. You know kids! When he was going to high school, he had a Trans Am. He knew how to steer the buses. But of course when he was riding with me, I never let him steer. I always did that. I just taught him how to use that brake and to use the gas pedal. I told him, “Don’t just mash down on that pedal to start out. You got to take it easy.” I taught him how. I said, “You can feel your wheels coming to a stop, and when you feel those wheels, then you let up on that air just a little bit.”

McCreery: So you told him how to make a smooth ride, didn’t you?

Gauer: Yes.

McCreery: Does that take a lot of practice to get that right?

Gauer: Yes, it does. Of course, when I operated a streetcar we had our air brakes, but you used your hand. Used your hand, that’s what I beat the guy over the head with. [laughter] Those things were heavy, and they had a lot of steel on them. It’s a wonder I didn’t kill the guy. Next day, I went by the mailbox where--he was leaning on that mailbox when I left, and the next day when I went by there, there was just blood all over that. [laughter] Actually, I really felt bad about it afterwards. Then everybody started calling me “champ,” you know? [laughter]

McCreery: You said your son drove for about twenty years and then was injured?

Gauer: Yes. He had to quit. I blame his wife for that. Well, for moving him up to Las Vegas. He married a black girl, you know. I even told him, “Now don’t you think you could drive a bus?” He said, “Mom, I could if it wasn’t for having to change buses every day and have a different seat. Those seats just kill my back.”

McCreery: Tell a little bit about what the injury was. It was his back?

Gauer: I don’t really know for sure what it was. I knew it was a fall. It was in the yard. I know, at one point, he fell and hit his back on the steps when he fell. But that was before I quit work, and I got onto him then for not making out an accident report on it. He said, “Oh, it didn’t hurt, just a little bit.” But, you don’t know your back’s hurt at the time. Sometimes, those injuries come later.



McCreery: Before I forget, tell me about when you got the thirty-year safe driver award. Tell me how you found out, and what they did about it.

Gauer: Well, when I got it, well, they sent me a notice, and they gave me a patch with the thirty years on it. Then they made up this party, and where that girl from transit--what's her name? Anyway, she's with the board of directors for AC Transit.

McCreery: Jeanne Holmes, it says here, who was president of the board of directors at the time.

Gauer: Then that plaque that she's holding, [Robert E.] Nisbet had signed it.

McCreery: Because he was general manager at that time, what was that like, to be the very first woman to get that award?

Gauer: I was pretty proud of it. Why wouldn't I be? I worked hard for it. Then I got kind of embarrassed because they made such a big to-do out of it, you know? [laughter] I wasn't expecting all that. Then the *San Francisco Chronicle* got it, that radio station over there got it, and they made me citizen of the week, and then the *Tribune* and the *Contra Costa Times*--it was something. Fact is, my sister that I live with [Edna Nicks], she kept those articles out of the papers. But my brother came out here from Colorado, and I gave mine to him. I had one but I gave it to him. She said that she packed it with some of my stuff. We had a storage shed, and she said she packed it out there, and she didn't know where it was. She didn't know how to dig it out.

McCreery: Well, that is a lot to be proud of. That's a wonderful safety record. How do you think you avoided accidents for all of those years?

Gauer: Well, just how you avoid accidents in your car. Now, I tell you, when I was operating a streetcar, I slid into a few things [laughter] because a streetcar don't stop with those rails. You slide. One time, up there in front of Sears Roebuck, a guy was driving here on the right of me, and I was on the streetcar. He had stopped behind the safety zone, and he went on past that and cut in front of me, and I hit the brake, and I slid right into him. He cut in front of me to make the left turn, and I slid right into him.

Then another time, I was in front of Payless there, by Capwell's, a guy cut in front of me and stopped. He stopped and I slid into him, but there was a policeman on the car at that time, and he got out and give him a citation. [laughter] But I still had to make out accident reports on both of them. But that's streetcar operating.

McCreery: Well, congratulations, that's a wonderful thirty-year award. That's a long time.



Gauer: I don't know why they didn't give you Edith Stiles's name. She used to live in Martinez. I don't know whether she still does or not. But I know that she was working for County Connection because--I tell you why I know. Just about the time I was ready to quit, I told the girl, Joan, who was my superintendent, I said, "If Edith Stiles ever comes in here for a job, you give her a job, because you'll get one of the best operators you ever had." She got the job right away.

McCreery: Well, I'm glad to have her name.

Gauer: Yes, she was the second woman to get a thirty-year safe driving, that I know of.

McCreery: You were the first and she was the second. Who were some of the other really good operators?

Gauer: Well, Wilma, she had a good record.

McCreery: Your sister.

Gauer: And of course with me, my husband asked me why it took me so long to get it. [laughter] I said, "Because I was too honest, I guess!" I made out accident reports. If anything happened on that bus, I made an accident report.

McCreery: You were really good about that, reporting anything that happened?

Gauer: Wilma was too. She really had a good driving record. She drove thirty-one years, Wilma did.

McCreery: I wonder what else I should have asked you? What did I forget?

Gauer: Not a thing that I know of.

McCreery: Well, it was awfully nice to hear about your career. I have the feeling that you wouldn't mind being out there still. Thank you for telling me all about this. And if you think of anything else later on, we can add it. Can you think of anything else right now you want to say?

Gauer: No, I think that's about it. I told you all the highlights. [laughter]

McCreery: You did a great job. Thank you.





Gauer: Thank you.



## TAPE GUIDE--Reba L. Gauer

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## Laura McCreery

Laura McCreery is a senior interviewer in UC Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office, where she manages projects on California government and politics, public policy, and higher education. Since 1996 she also has done private oral history consulting, project management, and workshops for such clients as Reed College, the Society of California Archivists, Prytanean Alumnae, Inc., the Berkeley Historical Society, and the Novato History Museum. She holds a B.A. in Speech Communication from San Diego State University and an M.S. in Mass Communications from San Jose State University.









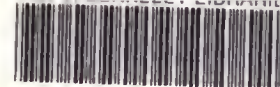


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